introspeculation
spectrum magazine fall 2022

eboard

Natasha Khoo
President

Elzie Doyle
Creative Director

Naomi Desai
Co-Social Media Manager
Designer

Charles Madden
Co-Social Media Manager
Designer

Mia Merchant
Managing Editor

Lily Weber
Secretary

RJ Frankenberry
Financial Manager

Sree Vangala
Event Planner

art + writing committee members

Hollie Park
Nikkita Pandey
Saadhi Jakka
Lauren Violette
Anushka Chandiramani
Jamie Kaplan

Grace Wilson
Kayla Myklebust
Val Goorha
Quinn Pasmantier
Maya Abel
Elizabeth Cui
Patricio Pino
Bailey Shropshire
Anushka Chandiramani
Claire O'Neill
Jamie Kaplan
Bryana Dawkins
Sophia Olivieri
Ava Morin

puritancapital
Supported by the Student Activity Fee

Cover art adapted from "Crawled out of the Abyss" by Ila Jagannath

Copyright© Spectrum Literary Arts Magazine and respective authors. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced without the permission of Spectrum Literary Arts Magazine and/or respective authors. Spectrum Literary Arts Magazine reserves the right to edit submissions for layout, grammar, spelling, and punctuation unless otherwise indicated by the author. Any references to people living or dead are purely coincidental except in the case of public figures. The views and opinions represented in this media do not necessarily reflect those of Northeastern University or the staff of Spectrum Literary Arts Magazine.

table of contents

4 **A Letter from Lily** // Lily Weber

5 **Views from the Highline** // Maya Abel
Money Girl // Elizabeth Cui

7 **Verdigris** // Elzie Doyle
What Changes in the Retelling // Riven Gao

9 **Goldfish** // Elzie Doyle

11 **A.M. Rainfall** // Patricio Pino
Outstanding // Sophia Olivieri

13 **Days of the Week** // Jesica Bak
Wait // Hermant Chatterji

15 **A rainy evening** // Hermant Chatterji

17 **Evergreen** // Natasha Khoo
Idée Fixe // Bryana Dawkins

19 **Captured in Time** // Hermant Chatterji

21 **J Chilling** // David Du
Beer // Michael Estabrook
Snapshots // David Du

23 **Circular** // Sree Vangala
Intertwined // Naomi Desai

25 **Festival of Lights** // Elzie Doyle
Tanzaku // Juliana George

27 **The Place Where My Childhood Died** // Tiffany Tang
Shed Skin // Allison Zheng

29 **Joyride** // Sabrina Ruiz
An Invitation // Quinn Pasmantier

31 **All My Dreams Are Memories** // Quinn Pasmantier
Daring Daydreamer // Zach Simon

33 **Judgement Day** // Natasha Khoo
To Young Me // Zach Simon

35 **Crawled out of the Abyss** // Ila Jagannath
Sleeping Beauty // Lily Weber

37 **World at Hand's End** // Omarlyn Martinez

39 **Youth!** // Ellie Fitton

toc. cont.

41 **I Took My Own Virginity** // Taylor Little
I Don't Know How to Swim // Elzie Doyle

43 **Dear Angel** // Milena Kozlowska
Human Fishbowl // Naomi Desai

47 **Maximalism** // Quinn Pasmantier
Inner Child // Sabrina Ruiz

49 **Forward; Backward** // Sree Vangala
Night // Omarlyn Martinez

51 **Snippets from a Modern Love** // Hermant Chatterji
Filters. // Katrina Makayan

53 **The Seasons in Your Eyes** // Liv Minutillo
Spellbinding // Charles Madden

55 **Act One, Scene One** // Kristina DaPonte
Vivid Vibrations // Sabrina Ruiz

57 **The Spirit of Performance** // Gabriela Lehmann Rodriguez
Just Here to Have Fun // Katrina Makayan

59 **Forgive Me** // Grace Wilson
Carmine // Elzie Doyle

61 **Ichor and Bone** // Mia Merchant
To Sleep, Perchance to Dream // Zach Simon
Eiffel's Shade // Charlie Madden

63 **Self-Portrait** // Omarlyn Martinez

a letter from lily

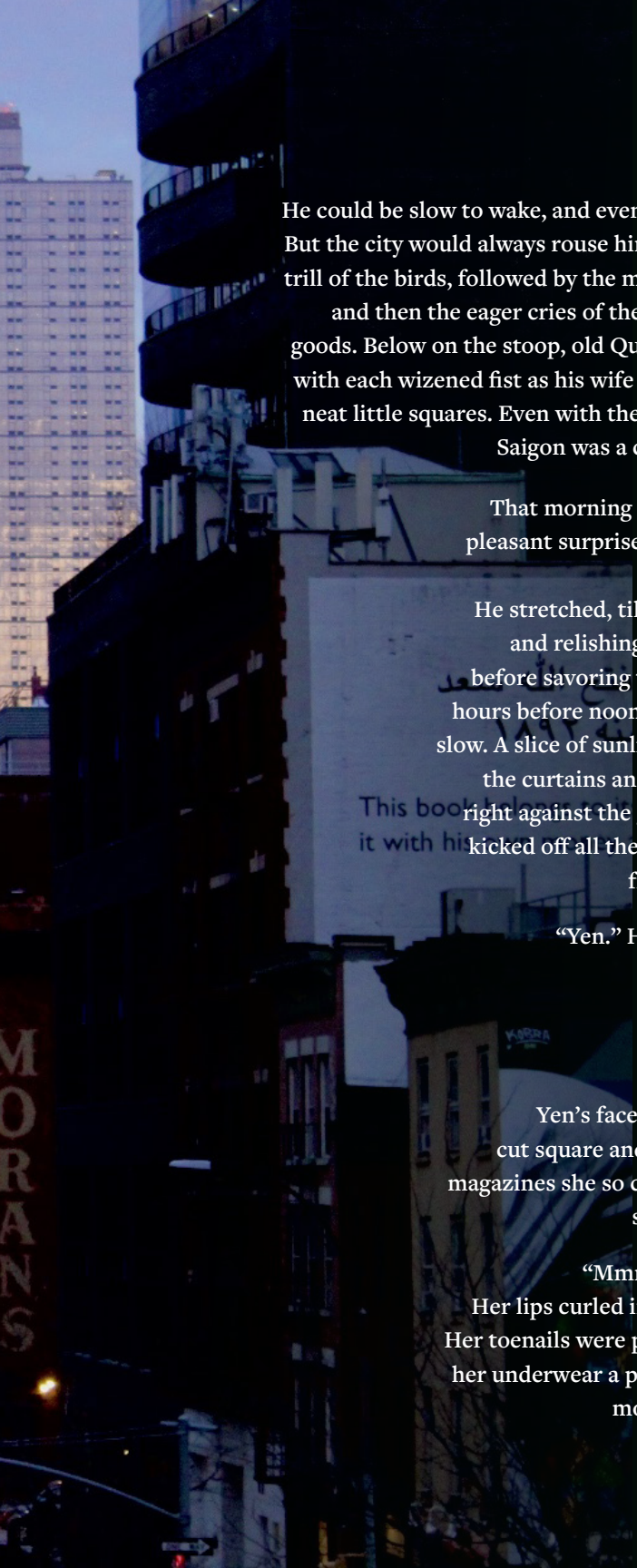
As I embark on my final year in Spectrum, I can't help but consider the person I was when I first joined and the person I am now. I think that when it comes to college—the years that are ordained to be the best of your life—there exists a tendency to cling to the notion that you will go through immense growth and change. By the time we walk that stage and receive that blank diploma, everyone in the sea of black gowns has supposedly become exactly who they want to be. I can't help but see that mindset as inevitably leading to disappointment. Those standards are impossibly high, especially during a four year period which is destined to be turbulent, draining, and in our case, includes a pandemic.

I picture the scared first year who joined a host of clubs feverishly seeking connection, and I am painfully aware of the fact that I am currently a scared fourth year who still feels that desperation. I don't think clubs can rid one entirely of those emotions, but they do offer a community of others in a similar situation. Spectrum offers us a space to create, and to reflect.

When looking at the work of those who have bravely offered themselves up to be analyzed, it pushes me to put my own work out there. It offers a gentle reminder that other people exist and struggle with the same things you struggle with. When a considerable amount of your time is spent in a small apartment with even smaller windows, it's easy to forget the outside world even exists. I hope that Spectrum has offered its members some sort of solace, even for just an hour, and will continue to do so long after its senior members have left the graduation stage.

views from the highline

// Maya Abel



Money Girl // Elizabeth Cui

July 1994

He could be slow to wake, and even slower in the dead of summer. But the city would always rouse him soon enough — first with the trill of the birds, followed by the money men on their motorbikes, and then the eager cries of the hawkers and the smell of their goods. Below on the stoop, old Quong would be cracking peanuts with each wizened fist as his wife folded sheets of rice paper into neat little squares. Even with the rusted windows clamped shut, Saigon was a city that demanded to be heard.

That morning he had woken first, much to his pleasant surprise. She lay beside him, muttering softly in her sleep.
He stretched, tilting his head in every direction and relishing the cracks of each fleshy joint, before savoring the view before him. It was still hours before noon, but the air simmered, hot and slow. A slice of sunlight had fought its way through the curtains and burned across the bed, falling right against the gentle curve of her ass. She had kicked off all the sheets and lay on her stomach, freckled legs entangled with his.

"Yen." He prodded her shoulder gently.
She rolled onto her side.
"Yen it's time to —"

He lowered his arm.

Yen's face was obscured by a mop of hair, cut square and short like those women in the magazines she so coveted, but today it had lost all shape in the throes of her sleep.

"Mmm ... shhh, Long, shh. Not now."
Her lips curled into the gentle threat of a smile. Her toenails were painted a ragged bright red, and her underwear a pale blue. He felt himself stiffen, momentarily, and wondered what she was dreaming of.

What changes in the retelling // Riven Gao

Rapunzel is no maiden locked up by an evil witch; there are no tower walls keeping her trapped. If only it were that simple.

The story goes like this:

Once upon a time, there is a woman in a house. The name of the woman does not matter; neither does the location of the house. There are a hundred different variations on this theme and none have ever made a difference.

This is what matters: the woman is loved, and the woman is afraid, and the woman cannot leave.

Or—no. The world has seen enough voyeuristic recountings of foolish women and the mistakes they make in the name of love. No. Maybe the story goes like this: She has been gone since morning, and the house itself mourns her absence. The gas-powered lights flicker and dim periodically, and when you close your eyes they almost seem like stars in the dusky-rose sky.

You don't quite know who you're supposed to be without her—you feel like you're this hollow, empty thing that only she can fill up with life. Automatonic.

You peer out of the window and wait.

The emptiness isn't all there is, though.

When she comes, she brings you back periwinkle asters and white carnations, picks wild clovers and clusters of honeysuckle with the sweetest little pockets of nectar. Gardenias and peonies line the window sills in tall crystal vases, scattering rainbows across the floor when the sunlight hits just right.

That night, you dine together in the soft candlelight and celebrate your anniversary over a feast. She's scattered rose petals across the threshold and all over your bed too, laughing at her own cheesiness but smiling shyly up at you despite it.

She tucks your long, long hair back behind your ear with the care of someone accustomed to breaking things but trying so very hard to be gentle. This is what she whispers in your ear, as the press of your bodies together makes you whole:

Nobody has ever made me feel like this before. You're beautiful. I love you.

You've never felt so seen. It's a beautiful feeling.

And yet.

The same fertile soil that nurtures your flowers also cultivates something rotten. Bone roses and gristle orchids strain to raise their heads above fetid mulch and loamy clay; some days, syrupy-sweet humidity thickens into something unbearable, and the whole house feels like a flashpoint waiting to implode.

On those days, when her face twists up into that venomous snarl she gets whenever you've done something wrong, she sinks the jagged edges of ugly truths into the soft of your vulnerable heart. Like she knows just where to twist to make you bleed. This is what she screams at you, as glass baubles and your heart shatter at your feet:

I saved you. I hate you sometimes. You are nothing without me.

You've never felt so seen. It's unbearable.

As you sit slumped in the quietest, darkest corner of the guest room, all-too-aware of the angry thuds in the room over, pitter-pattering raindrops glitter like a thousand tiny diamonds when the light hits the window. They look just like your wedding rings.

Where do you end and she begin? Where does the quiet rise-and-fall of her chest, illuminated by watery moonlight as you slip back into bed hours later, cease to sustain you?

You don't know. You don't know.

Some roots are too entangled to be cleaved.

You don't want a savior-prince, gallantly riding to the rescue, don't want to need one at all. So you wait. You hope next time will be different.

You will accept dandelions with their stems slightly crushed and pollen-y goldenrod that forces you into sneezing fits and, in the fall, plant bloody myrtle in the garden's summer-baked soil like you have something to prove. It will take a while to bloom, slumbering through winter and only beginning to stretch its frothy limbs in May.

problem—you have time. You are patient, and kind, and so very afraid. The problem with the story is this: you've heard it all before and it doesn't make a damn difference. It only makes you desperate for this retelling to be different.

You want to be a success story. To be hers, wholly and unreservedly. You want, you want, you want.

But all the wanting and wishing and wondering won't make the world so, and that's not even the worst truth you've had to swallow—no, that would be this:

The flowers on the windowsill have wilted, and this house is still home.

Flower meanings:

Asters—love, patience, elegance; purple asters specifically are associated with royalty and wisdom.

White carnations—purity and good luck.

Wild clovers—happiness, “think of me”.

Honeysuckle—sweetness, tenderness, bonds of love.

Gardenias—beauty, joy, secret love.

Peonies—romance, good fortune.

(Red) Roses—romantic love.

Dandelions—perseverance, lasting happiness.

Goldenrod—good fortune, prosperity, new beginnings.

Myrtle—happy marriage, romantic fulfilment.

Goldfish // Elzie Doyle

A.M. Rainfall // Patricio Pino

clasping moon-white
to wet knuckles—
In that
I was the stars trying,

looking
to quell— they
were on the edge,
on the husk of dreams

grasping
at intricacies and peeling
back now, between growth—
Lit and unlit
alleyways, knee and elbow, man
in the window, the streets;

Hit the ground
and we are short of words
and hard of glances—smiling
and curled up.

So much and so little,
Cradling the waver in my voice
as a child
spilling.

Outstanding || Sophia Olivieri

Days of the Week // Jesica Bak

On Sunday, I felt my bones rattle in tandem with the hum of all the refrigerator lights at the grocery store. I picked out my first bunch of scallions and watercresses, marking my first feat of real adulthood. I turned on NPR in the train and let it blare over the conductor's garbled voice, because I knew that real adults pretended to understand politics even in their free time. The last thing I heard was something about the UN and nuclear-proliferation before a man came up to me and asked for money, so I turned it off.

The rain washed over on Monday morning, in the humid-yet-slightly-damp-and-chilly way that only autumn in New England could be characteristic of. Seven kids walked past me as I stomped along my usual route to class, and none of them were shielding themselves from the rain except me, so I felt like a real chump. I had a shift at the alumni office, which meant that the bottoms of my sneakers left watery imprints on the linoleum floor when I walked in. I didn't understand why we needed to ask people who had graduated nearly thirty years ago for money, just so we could build another tech monolith. It depressed me to think about the English department's moldy kitchen, but eventually my lunch made me too drowsy to care so I went to the bathroom to take a nap.

I overslept on Tuesday, but still took my time to carefully paint my face, and secretly told myself that this was surely the day a guy theoretically resembling a Renaissance painting would fall in love with me. In actuality, I clocked six hours at the library reading Hume, wishing I was dead, and eating two croissants. I woke up with a post-it on my forehead that asked me to eat more quietly.

I handed in my Civics & Morality paper on Wednesday, and rewarded myself with an episode of trashy TV. I decided I was still learning by setting the subtitles to German. Later along the way to pick up my mail, I tossed my leftover gummy worms to the flock of pigeons on the sidewalk corner, thought about

Wait // Hemant Chatterji

my parents, and suddenly felt depressed. In chronological order, I deliberated for the upteenth time on going to university-facilitated therapy, effectively talked myself out of it, and bought a new scarf instead.

For a moment in time, my life finally felt like it was coming together on Thursday. I won an editorial contest I had entered in the spring, and the judges asked me to give a speech at the ceremony to other prospective writers. As I told my friends the news, their voices suddenly became distorted and warped as they frantically repeated "Aaarree yoouu suurre," and I realized I had dreamt it all up.

During my afternoon Friday lecture, my professor made a stale joke about the weekend, the kind that only middle-aged people make, and none of my classmates laughed. I felt bad for him because he looked so pathetic in the silence. My sympathy dissipated when he started to explain to us why colonialism was sometimes necessary for economic advancement. I still wrote his notes down in my composition book (with a defiant question mark at the end), and glanced over at the paper of the boy next to me. He was doodling a dinosaur. Even though I knew no one there, I tried to pick up a story at the college newspaper's pitch meeting later that night. I didn't understand why B, the editor, paired her silk blouse with a jean skirt, but I asked her if I could take the piece on the janitorial staff unionizing anyway. She must have somehow known what I thought about her jean skirt, because she demanded that I report on the school mascot's costume disappearing instead.

On Saturday, I met up with a friend, one of the situational ones, and uncomfortably listened to her talk about how something called 'the sustainability model' in corporations could save capitalism.

A rainy evening // Hemant Chatterji

I pondered this for a while but then I felt tired, so I faked an emergency phone call and went to go watch a movie at the theater. When it was over, I felt my insides ache from either the blueberry icee or from feeling alone, and made my way to the park to look at the ducks. I felt offended because they seemed to gravitate toward everybody except me. I called my mom.

After we hung up, I thought about the people who had died for political revolutions, and the mothers who had died for their children. I thought about how meaningful our words could be, but how simple everything really was, as well as why we couldn't distinguish our fear from our desires. I thought about the kind of wedding I would want to have one day, and whether I could picture my father walking me down the aisle. I thought about whether I would hate myself once my hands began to wrinkle and age, until they could no longer pick up a pencil. I thought about whether everything I did was a performance, and who I was indebted to for my privilege. I thought about the oceans in Korea, and the ongoing disputes over them. I thought about Thoreau, because at that moment, the water gently rippled in front of my very eyes and the sun began to melt too. Everything around me seemed to suggest that I was allowed to feel an unbearable weight of love and anticipation, as well as the belief that the next few decades of my life were going to be more than decent; that it had all really only just begun.

I picked up a new tub of Chunky Monkey on my way home and almost stepped on a dead rat in front of one of the fraternity houses on the block. But it was my first time in a while seeing the stars in the sky in such abundance, so I remember thinking everything was still worthwhile and beautiful.

Evergreen // Natasha Khoo

Idée Fixe // Bryana Dawkins

I want the life of that woman sitting there
on the outdoor cafe's no. 14 chair, reading the memoir of someone I don't know,
clad in a white dress, blood-red heels, houndstooth coat, and golden rings, with
a camellia tucked into her hair,

I imagine she's my Siamese twin, severed,
and would wonder why she's there with her head hung low but I already know
that she's waiting for her date to appear out of thin air, a man to memorize the
map that is her skin,

tracing routes from one birthmark to the next,
like an explorer charting new territory, for her body, lush and soft like a full moon,
is littered with a constellation of scars both accidental and self carved, as if she
were a marble effigy,

I wish I was that woman sitting there,
on the outdoor cafe's no. 14 chair, reading the memoir of someone I know, sitting
with legs crossed while staring out into the distance, waiting for that desired thing,
with a camellia tucked into my hair,

but I am a body hollowed out,
immured in shadow; I appear as nothing in front of a mirror, reflectionless, as a
faceless face and formless figure, watching her from a window across the street,
tattooing her name into my remains,

and the vestiges of my heart,
for all I feel is love towards the me I wish to be, a woman who seems to exist only
to be loved, to show that beauty is not an ideal but is real, and that in another life,
I could've been beautiful too.

Beer // Michael Estabrook

. . . one of the last things Dad did
before he died was to buy an Erector Set
to teach his sons how to build things . . .

There they are in the airport at the rental car counter
father and son, carbon copies of one another
tall, loud, brash, laughing, in control
the world is their clam (or is it oyster).
Hard to avoid looking at them looming loudly over everything
and of course I'm finding them annoying, obnoxious even.
But they are not really doing anything wrong
not being rude or disrespectful
simply being father and son two peas in a pod
same voice, same smile, same stance
finishing each other sentences right out there for all to see
which is probably the problem for me considering
that my dad died
before we could even have a beer together.

snapshots // David Du

—whoever named desperation
knew it intimately enough to let the
crashing flow of letters
align with the panic in my heart,
that hungry soul-sucking realization
that there is no such trap
as the greater good—at least,
not for you and definitely not for me,
if I'm being honest,
which I always am,
as if it'll undo all my cruelty and not
be the damning cause of it, but really,
why is it that honesty is associated with purity
or this innate paragon of goodness
when it is truth that slices your palms open
while I stand here as shocked
as I'll ever be these numb days,
and it is truth that sends shivers down
your gasoline-soaked spine whilst the
torches are in my unbleeding hands,
and it is truth—
nothing but the goddamned truth—
that forces you to sit up in bed
with your back firmly against the
grounding, steady headboard
while you shake when horror
dawns upon you instead of
the sun's reassuring light,
as you think to yourself that—

festival of lights // Elzie Doyle

i sealed a wish with glue last night and this morning i peeled it open and ate it.

the paper didn't melt in my mouth, it sat leaden and sharp and it cut my tongue,
like my first babysitter threatened to do.

the ink stained my teeth and i thought of the time my mother ordered squid ink pasta. she
sometimes likes to play at being adventurous.

made my saliva taste like the night i had my first cigarette. i didn't spit because
i wanted to impress someone i don't speak to anymore.

i've done my share of wishing.

my spare change is in the well, my candle wicks are black and smoking,
my left eye is filled in with marker.

but i can't see the stars from here, my marker is running dry,

and the wind won't carry wet paper away.

the words are smearing and my throat is clogged and this wish isn't coming true.

i read somewhere that wishes stay in your stomach seven years.

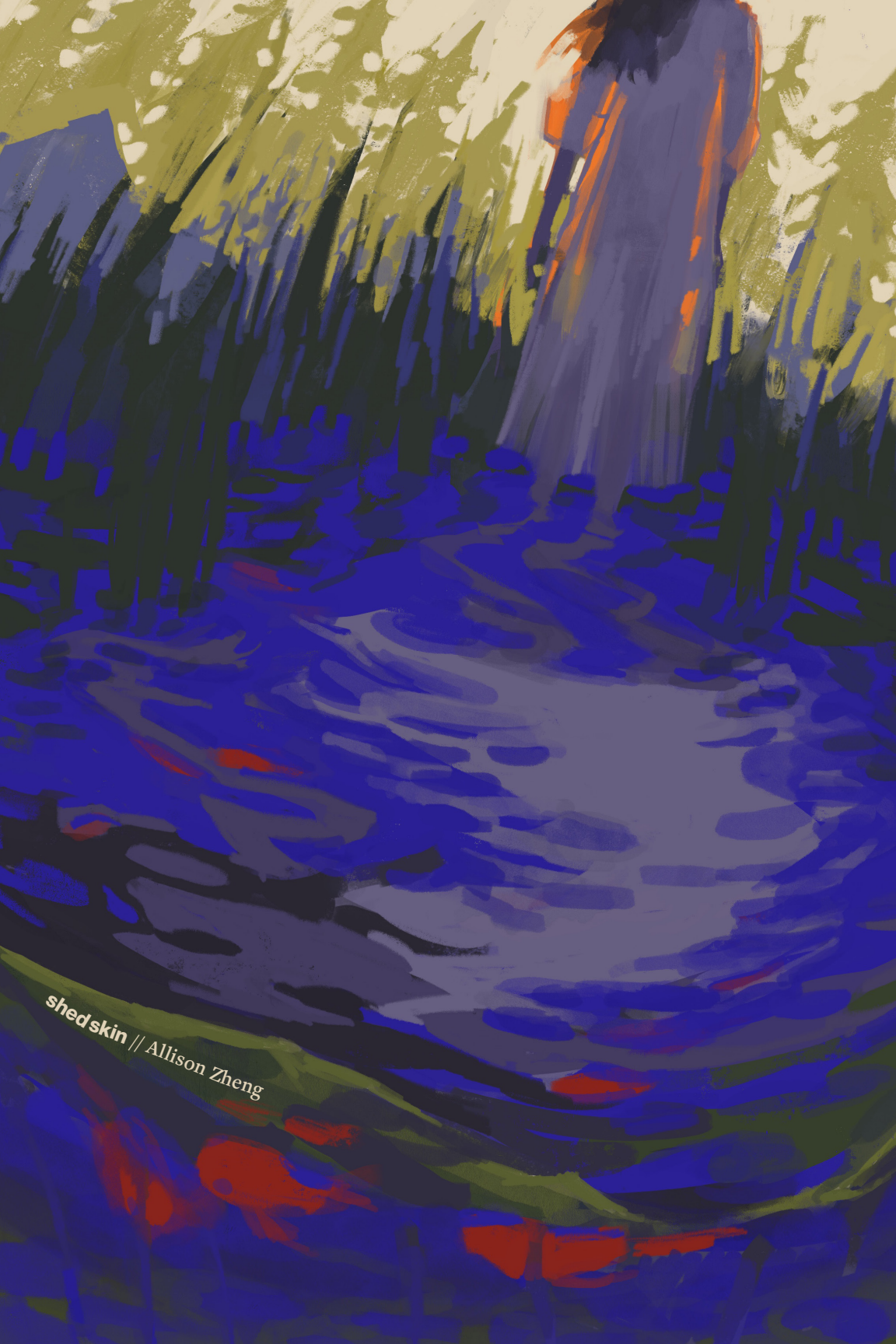
i bite, i bleed, i swallow.

The Place Where My Childhood Died // Tiffany Tang

It was at a weird transitionary point, both the house and I. The creaky hardwoods were balanced with garishly painted walls reminiscent of the mid 80s. In every nook, a spider. And me, all limbs, a puff of hair, and a glowing depth of security soon to be shattered. What had sold my father on the house was the beautiful lake. “I saw a flock of geese land on the water.” He told us with seemingly bright conviction. It was almost funny that shortly after we moved he would leave the state for work.

Good afternoons were ones where I gently cupped frogs in my hands. They would sit, content, and even more so if you sprinkled water on them. Hours spent with my sister on the lake squealing and splashing, but also contemplating and watching the soft shadows of fish dart to and fro beneath our feet. I never caught any.

And then, running into the house, soaking wet and clay between our toes. A cold shower and then a hot meal. The perfect evening was a 20 minute drive away. First, we would pass the horses and rows of tobacco, cotton, or corn depending on the season. Then the small brick churches. Then onto the major road. Empty, but two lanes each way. And finally the shopping center. We ambled carelessly; eyes were trained on us but we were trained not to see them. In the winter, not even five blankets were warm enough. Every footstep ice, every window a sheet of frost. In the summer, the loud chirping of crickets a lullaby. I cling to these memories, and choose to ignore the moonlit room where I clutched my chest and dreamt wildly of running away. All alone, out in that place where the sun set on my childhood and night became it.


shed skin // Allison Zheng

joyride // Sabrina Ruiz

An Invitation // Quinn Pasmantier

Poke through perforated plastic
Snip through syncopated laughing
Sift through things after the fact and
come with me, we'll be fantastic,

Sever through the slipping, spastic,
hard-to-reach, enthusiastic,
speckled, spotted, almost-plastic
yellowed, ripping, old elastic—

And break your ties to former lives!
Come walk with us, we'll be alright,
We can't tell where we'll go tonight,
But it's not here, and that's just
fine!

Daring Daydreamer // Zach Simon

World shaper, poet
Weaving together windows to another world
Repiecing the jigsaw of reality

A shoddy, flowing patchwork becomes a still picture
A brief glimpse into the inner stitchings of your mind

So boldly vulnerable to show us
What lies within

Judgement Day // Natasha Khoo

To Young Me // Zach Simon

As the red-pink hues pass away
and the falling leaves become your home
some memories fade to ash
some nestle in your breast

Do not mourn the ashes, child
the wind takes the cremated,
traces of life lived,
and frees them

Focus on how the wind caresses your face, thumb on cheek
not what it washes away
your heart is big enough to hold
stories yet untold

Do not fear the ever-changing breeze
new homes carry new dangers
but also new opportunities
you shall learn to manage both

explore, and be as free as you were in the past
lest you become trapped by it
and suffocate on the ash
The tides of change, though uncertain, provide everlasting
nourishment
so drink freely

Crawled out of the Abyss || Ila Jagganath

Sleeping Beauty // Lily Weber

When I sleep,
Do your fingers find my flesh?
I wish I knew but then again I don't

When I lay down beside you
Do your eyes open wide
in anticipation?

When you press a pill into my waiting palm
Tell me it will help
Are you creating more pain than you're abating?

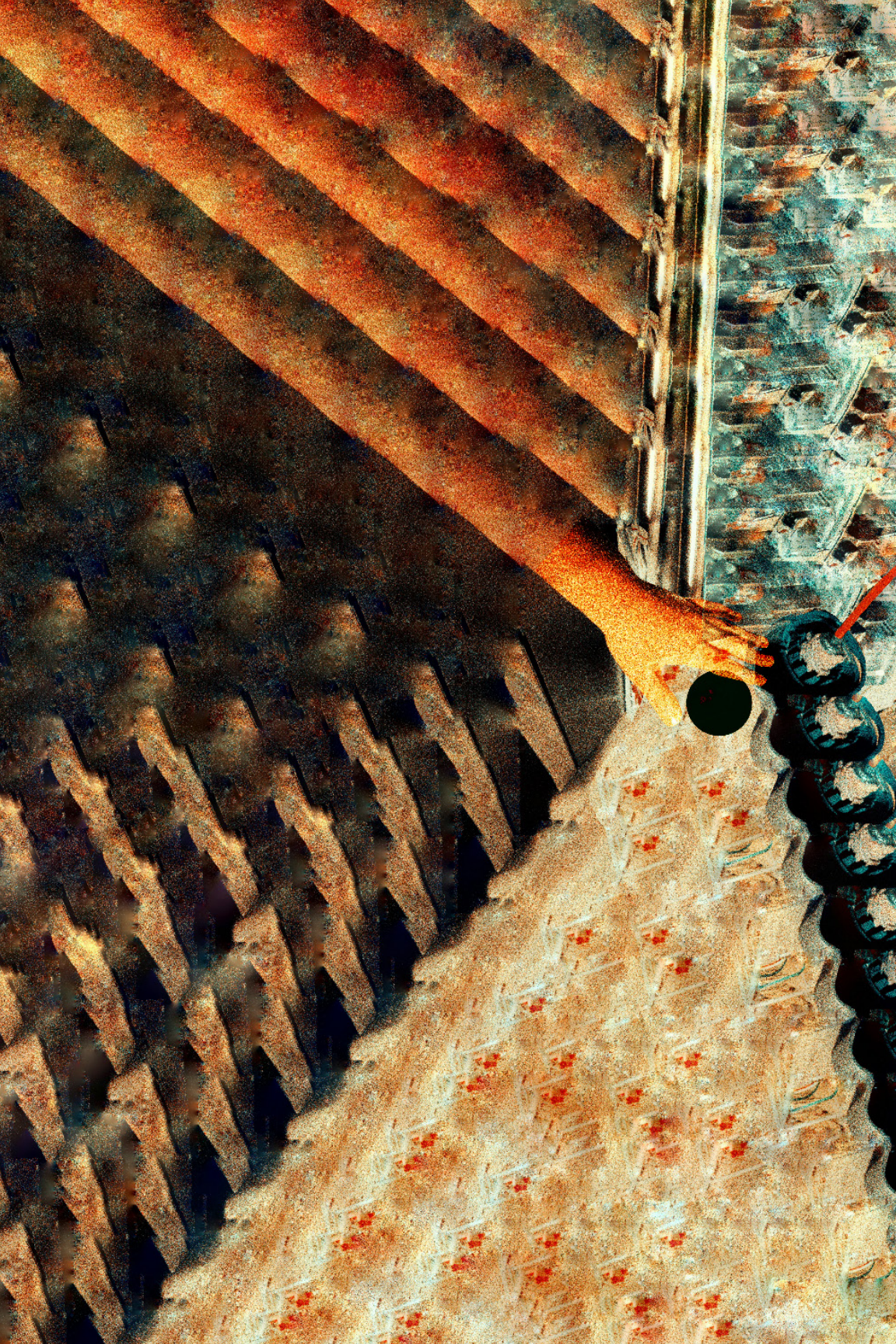
What do you do
When the lights go out?
And my eyes slide shut
And my world goes dark

Do your hands creep
Beneath the covers?
Graze my skin
Do they slide beneath the fabric of my waistband

Am I wearing anything at all?
Or am I entirely naked
Clothes crumpled
In a heap
on the floor

Will you dress me again later?
Will I wake up,
Shirt on backwards
Buttons undone
A question in my eyes
An answer in yours?

When I shower in your bathroom
Will my body feel entirely alien?
As if it's not my own
When I walk back
Into your bedroom
Wrapped tightly in a towel
As if I can erase what
You've already seen
Will you tell me what you've done?
Will I ask?
Or will I already know?



World at Hand's End // Omarlyn Martinez

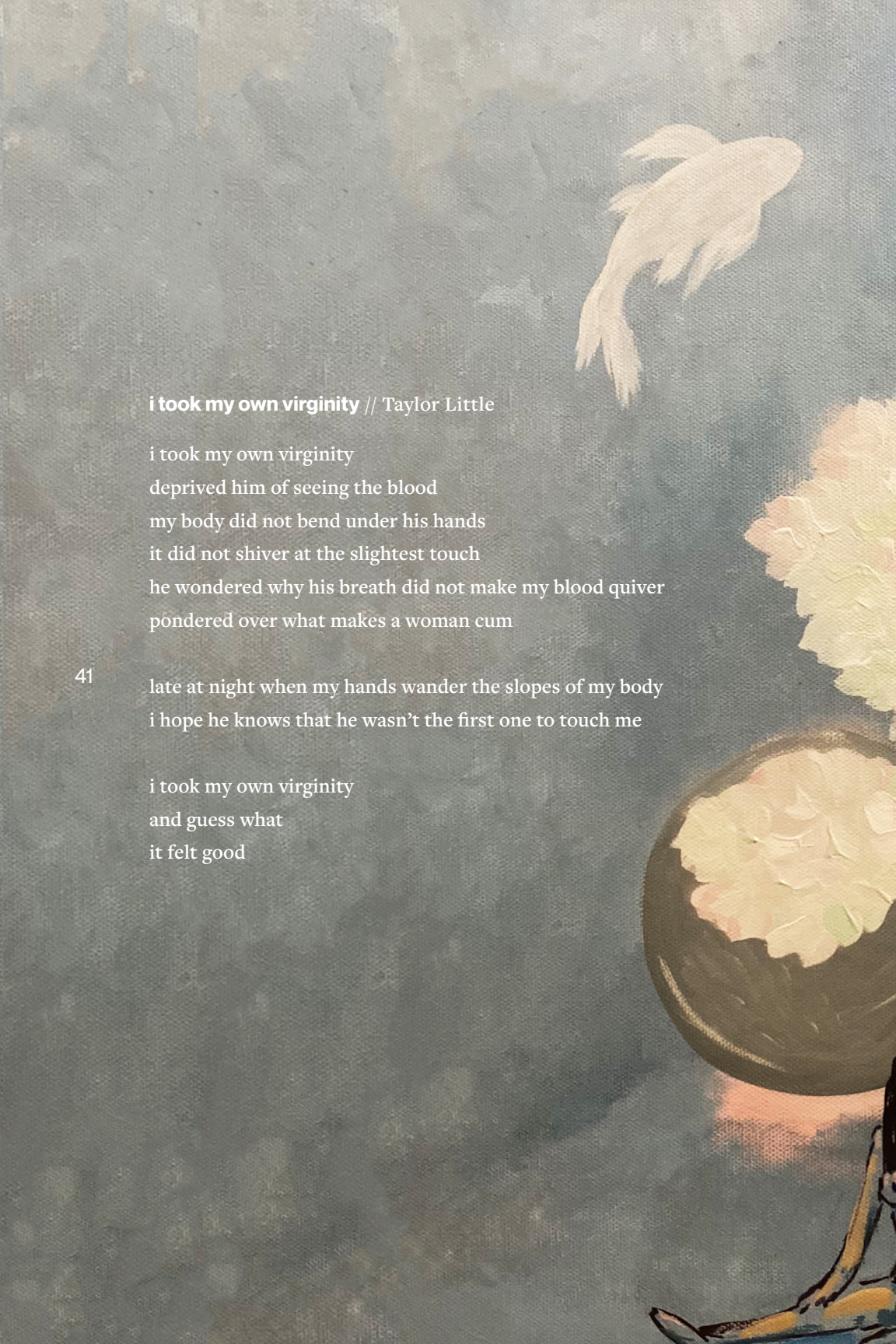
Youth! // Ellie Fitton

i took my own virginity // Taylor Little

i took my own virginity
deprived him of seeing the blood
my body did not bend under his hands
it did not shiver at the slightest touch
he wondered why his breath did not make my blood quiver
pondered over what makes a woman cum

late at night when my hands wander the slopes of my body
i hope he knows that he wasn't the first one to touch me

i took my own virginity
and guess what
it felt good



I don't know how to swim // Elizabeth Doyle

Dear Angel,

Do you remember me?

A few years ago, I was your best friend. You conjured me out of brambles on the outskirts of the playground, drew me up out of the soil like a plant blooming in your sunshine. It's my first memory, sitting in soggy wood chips across from you. Raindrops passed through my body like air, but when they hit you, they changed course and slid down your skin, plastered blonde hair to your forehead.

You saw me. Everyone else looked right through me, but you saw me.

"Do you want to be friends?" you asked me.

It was the first word I remembered saying. "*Yes*."

I followed you everywhere. You transformed gardens into vast kingdoms, summoned magical creatures out of the shadows in your bedroom, discovered buried treasures in patches of dirt. I was your advisor, your queen, your fellow adventurer, your sidekick. I was whoever you wanted me to be.

Sometimes you had to go to family dinners or classroom meetings alone, and then I wandered around, lost and confused. I'd look down and see the shape of my body flicker, blurring into nothing. I felt like a leaf twisting in the wind, going nowhere. But you always brought me back.

Do you remember the first time you grabbed my arm? My skin tingled, nerves on fire. It was the first time anyone had ever touched me. My breath caught in my throat. You grinned like it was nothing.

Do you remember when we sat in your bedroom, legs crossed, a breath apart, and you told me all your secrets?

I heard your sister's voice outside the room saying, "Who's she talking to?"

And your mom answering, "Oh, it's just her imaginary friend again."

"Isn't she a little old for that?"

But that was all I heard, because something I'd said had made you burst into a peal of electric laughter. And all I could do was lean in, closer to you, to your voice, to the smell of your coconut-scented shampoo. You eclipsed my vision. You were my world.

We talked for hours that night. Do you remember? Flipping through magazines, confiding about our crushes. Trying on the lipstick you stole from your mom's room. Stuffing hot, gooey mac n' cheese from a giant pot into our faces as quickly as we could, since your sister would be home soon and we weren't supposed to be eating her food. We slept in your bed, limbs tangled up together. It was the first time I felt warm.

Slowly, people started seeing me. The other kids in the hallway sometimes looked at me, instead of through me. They talked to you, mostly, but sometimes they said things to me. One time, Mrs. Williams

called on me. I was so startled, all I could do was stammer, "I don't know." The other students giggled. But it didn't matter. She had *seen* me.

A year passed, and I got used to it. I started smiling back when people acknowledged me in the hallway. I started raising my hand in class. I started standing in line for the cafeteria and eating lukewarm pizza and watery apple slices next to you, insulated from the din of noise by your presence.

Do you remember our first fight?

I didn't know why you were mad. We were supposed to be mad at *other* people together.

"I don't want to see you anymore," you said. It was all you would say, no matter how much I begged and pleaded.

I wandered around the neighborhood in a daze. I cried and cried, until the tears stopped rolling off my face, stopped sliding down my skin. They started splashing straight onto the sidewalks instead, passing right through me like there was nothing there. You made me real, and then you left me.

Even when we made up, things weren't the same. You talked to your other friends more than me. You didn't look at me the same. You didn't smile at me as much. Without you, I faded. I clung to your every acknowledgement of my presence, like a dying plant sucking up droplets of water.

Do you remember the night of your junior prom? You were in a group of people, but somehow everyone else filtered out of your room until it was just the two of us cross-legged on your velvety black blanket covered in lint and crumbs, like nothing had changed. I watched, mesmerized, as you applied your makeup, and listened as you talked about your life: about the girls and boys you'd dated or kissed and the people you'd smoked with and the drama in your various friend groups. Such a strange, distant world, so far out of my reach. Then you asked, "Can I do your makeup too?"

It had never occurred to me that I could wear makeup.

You spent what felt like hours studying my face. I could smell the bubblegum you'd been chewing. I could count your eyelashes, thick with mascara.

Your makeup brushes tickled my skin. You touched me like it was nothing, grabbing my face, tilting it to the side, humming thoughtfully as you brushed hair out of my face. You closed my eyelids and painted eyeliner on them, cool and wet. You dabbed something sparkly on my eyes and cheeks. You lingered on my lips, carefully tracing their outline. In that moment, nothing existed except your fingers on my lips and my heartbeat thudding in my ears.

You let out a long breath, examined my face, then smiled and tilted my head towards your mirror.

The girl in the mirror was bold, brazen, with deep-red lips and glittery skin.

And that night, I was warm and solid and real. At your prom, I clung to the edges of the dance-floor, but people looked at me. Someone took a photo and showed me, and I was more than a shadowy blur in the background.

Then you left the dance with a boy. I wandered around until the throngs of people had gone home, until I was the only one left in the dim

high school cafeteria, floating aimlessly like one of the balloons that drifted along the ceiling.

Why did you leave me after that night? Maybe you got caught up in your life, in your other world where I don't belong. Maybe you forgot about me. Maybe you outgrew me, maybe I was like a childhood sweater, or a stuffed animal fallen out of favor.

That was the last time you talked to me.

I think that was the last time I talked to anyone.

I'm not really sure. I think it's been months, but it's hard to keep track. Days and nights blur together, and long stretches of time are missing from my memory. Sometimes I just appear in a new place— in a gas station bathroom, at a cafe, on a swing set at midnight. A little more of me gets lost each time.

Piece by piece, I've been disappearing. Most people's eyes slide right over me. When I talk, no one hears.

The girl with the pretty makeup is gone. When I look at mirrors, there's usually no reflection. But when there is, my lips are cracked and pale, my eyelashes faded. There's no trace of the sticky and glittery powders and creams you painted on my face. When I hold my hand over my chest, I can't feel a heartbeat.

I don't really know why I'm writing this letter. It's getting harder and harder to write anything at all. Every minute that passes, I have to press down on the pen harder before it makes a mark on the page, and sometimes the words smudge and disappear altogether.

I don't know where I am right now. There's fog all around. A faint white light, too, glowing through the gloom. Where's it coming from?

Are you coming to save me?

Part of me hopes you will. You've always come back before. With a word, with a smile. With something, anything, to make me real again.

But it's been so long, and I'm not sure there's anything left of me.

It's like when we were kids, swinging in sync until we were so high that we were airborne, flying through the deep blue, surrounded by nothing but sky. There's only air around me again, but you're not here to bring me back to the ground, to grab the chain of my swing while laughing wildly, to dig deep brown grooves into the wood chips with your sneakers. Do you remember that?

Do you remember me at all? Was I ever real?

The light keeps getting dimmer.

Are you there?

Do you still want to be friends?

Yours,

M.

Maximalism // Quinn Pasmantier

inner child // Sabrina Ruiz

my inner child wants to dance in an empty room
to those early 2000s throwbacks
she wants to go back in time to those trips to
the toys section at the department store after school she hid not
long after being rejected so many times and after those
traumatic incidents that ruined her innocence now she doesn't
come out until after a few drinks she doesn't speak until
depression leads her to surrender her ego it felt like there was a
rush to grow up
and now she's unable to stop, the addiction is too strong
but sometimes, i bring her to the swings
she can't help but enjoy herself again
i still encourage her to finger paint and make sand castles
and she beams with reluctant joy
but she still feels so afraid to spill her true colors again
because you ruined her
who's you?
all of you

forward; backward // Sree Vangala

"Are you going to jump?" I ask, joining him on the balcony.

The answer doesn't matter all that much to me.
The silence that I knew I'd invariably receive, even less.

One more time. "Well, are you?"

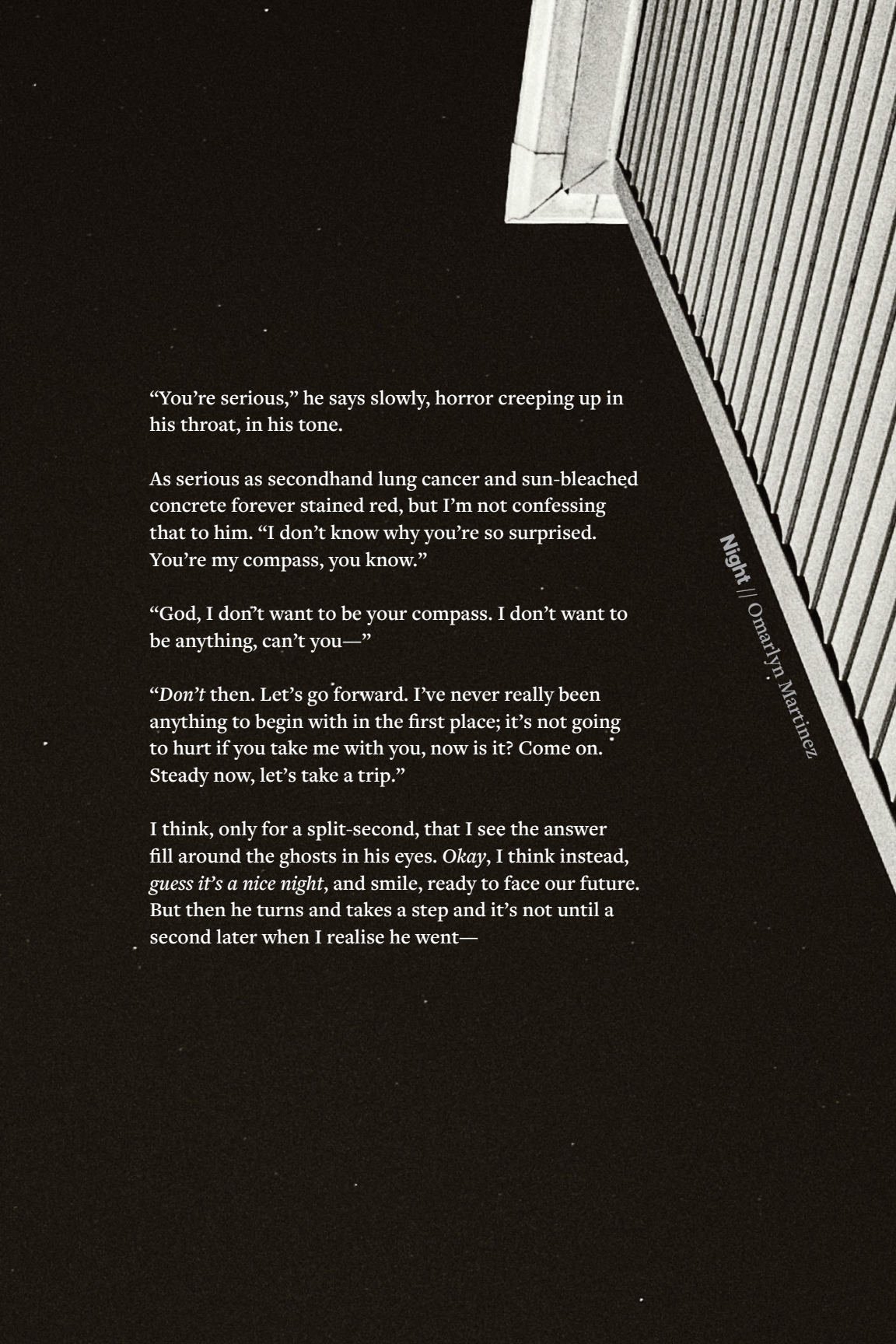
Mother on deployment—colonel, we're so proud—and father in London for a maths conference. His brother's in college—honours, at that—and his other brother's in the Peace Corps. My best friend has never been allowed to be anything less than perfect.
Me, on the other hand—ha!—I've *never* been destined for anything good. And yet life goes on.

"Okay," I say, and lean forward on the solid ironcast railing, looking farther out. It's a nice spring night, a soft breeze gently singing its own praises through the city. It'd be better yet if the scent of 2B's menthol cigarettes didn't waft up here, but the night is pleasant enough anyway. "You know what? I'm in the mood for a trip. Which way are we going?"

There: a sharp break in his apathetic, sullen façade.
He looks up, but winter's cold claws are still holding steadfast to his frown.
Well then.
It's a nice night, indeed.

"Forward, or backward?" I ask, and glance at the iron fence farther out. Fleur-de-lis detailings. Sharp. My luck can't be that bad—but then again, I'd failed physics last year to have any earthly idea, hadn't I? Okay then. A closed casket ceremony is fine by me. If need be, of course.

Guess I might not need to worry about how bright orange and metal grey may wash me out in the future. Funny. At least I know that reds and bruised purples bring out the best in me.



"You're serious," he says slowly, horror creeping up in his throat, in his tone.

As serious as secondhand lung cancer and sun-bleached concrete forever stained red, but I'm not confessing that to him. "I don't know why you're so surprised. You're my compass, you know."

"God, I don't want to be your compass. I don't want to be anything, can't you—"

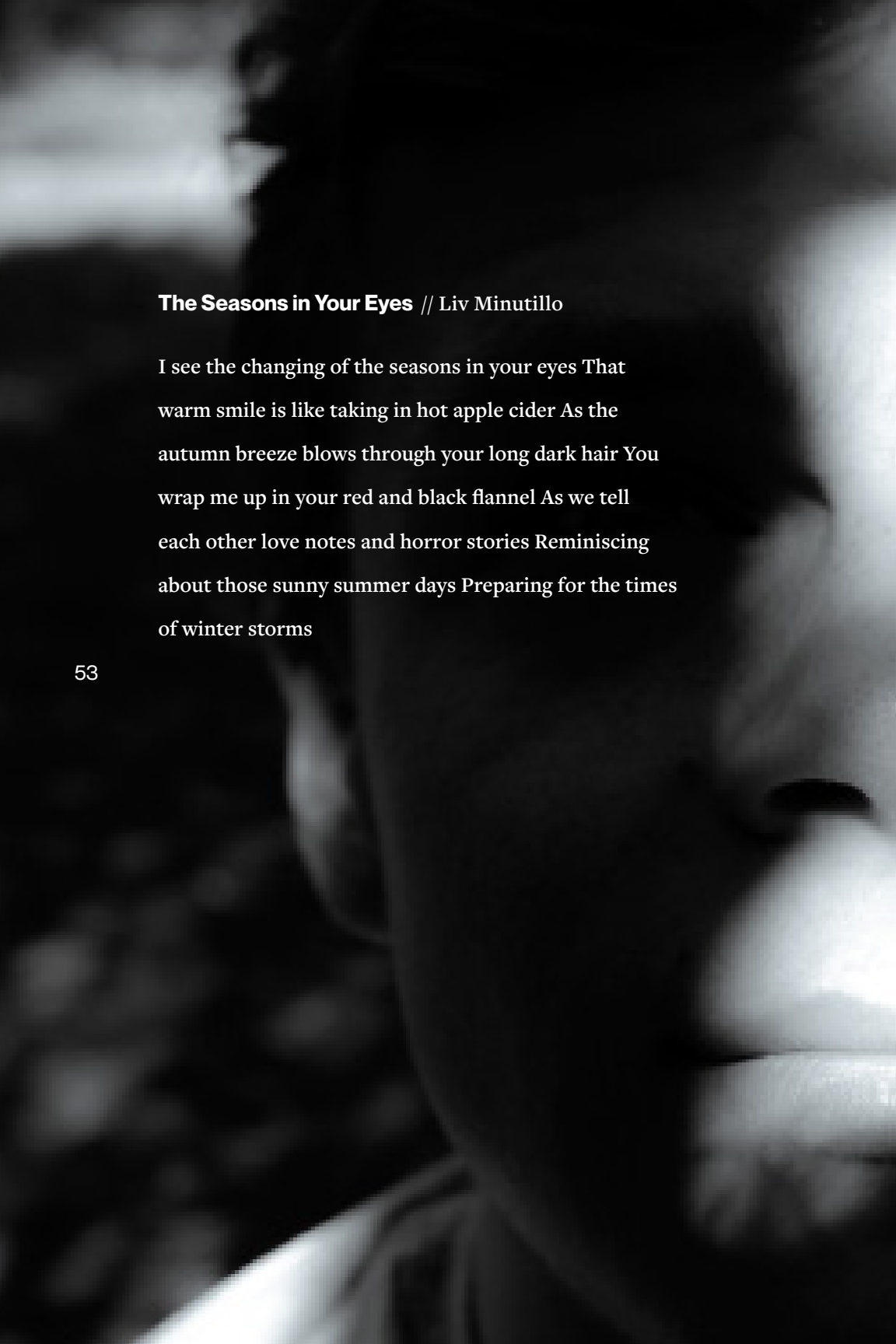
"*Don't* then. Let's go forward. I've never really been anything to begin with in the first place; it's not going to hurt if you take me with you, now is it? Come on. Steady now, let's take a trip."

I think, only for a split-second, that I see the answer fill around the ghosts in his eyes. *Okay*, I think instead, *guess it's a nice night*, and smile, ready to face our future. But then he turns and takes a step and it's not until a second later when I realise he went—

Snippets from a modern love // Hemant Chaterji

filters. // Katrina Makayan

we walk hand in hand
after we've left the bar
with a couple drinks in us.
if i don't think about it too much,
it almost feels real.
i do this every time.
we laugh at the same things
on the way home, taking turns
putting our lips on the shared
cigarette. they say you can get
to know someone over a smoke,
no one's ever done it with me
like this before. you tell me stories
of a home i've never been to,
but i have a good imagination.
i'm focusing on how you inhale
and exhale when i pass it back to you,
and i can't help but wonder how many
times this has been done before.
this happens every time.
the stories i want to spill stop
short at the end of my tongue,
blocked by the cigarette
we're bound to finish.
i stomp on it, along with the
rest of myself that i wish
i could put out for good.
i take your hand and lead you
up the stairs, leaving the filter
behind us, i won't be using it next time.



The Seasons in Your Eyes // Liv Minutillo

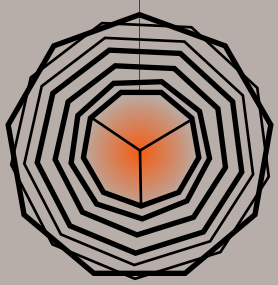
I see the changing of the seasons in your eyes That warm smile is like taking in hot apple cider As the autumn breeze blows through your long dark hair You wrap me up in your red and black flannel As we tell each other love notes and horror stories Reminiscing about those sunny summer days Preparing for the times of winter storms

Yes, I see the seasons in your eyes
With all that vibrancy, a cold darkness
Sending unwelcomed chills down my spine

act one, scene one // Kristina DaPonte

[enter dionysus.]

there are grapes hanging above
our sullied mouths, a temptress
not to be entangled with
we always thought she was a myth
yet here we go again.
fill the bottle with sour grapes
and stir and beat and let sit and shake
until it becomes liquid gold
the potion to end all the worries
that make us feel fragile and old
fill up our cracked glasses until
they overflow, now raise it to the sky!
are you having déjà vu, darling?
cheers to the night, get ready to spite her
it's time to say goodbye.
lick the sangria off our lips
and inside us blooms the rosé
as we dance cry drink the night away
no words between us are left unsung
oh, what i would give up to be forever
young.
fill it up fill it up and
raise it to the stars! encore, encore!
fill it up some more, more, more.
only up there is where we can feel
weightless.
sangria and rosé, mistresses of
pain and hurt and everything before,
we adore you we love you
even when we hit the floor.
the crash sounds just like a lullaby
bye.
all i have to remember you, love,
are broken bottles all over the place
and black mascara
dripping
down
my
face.



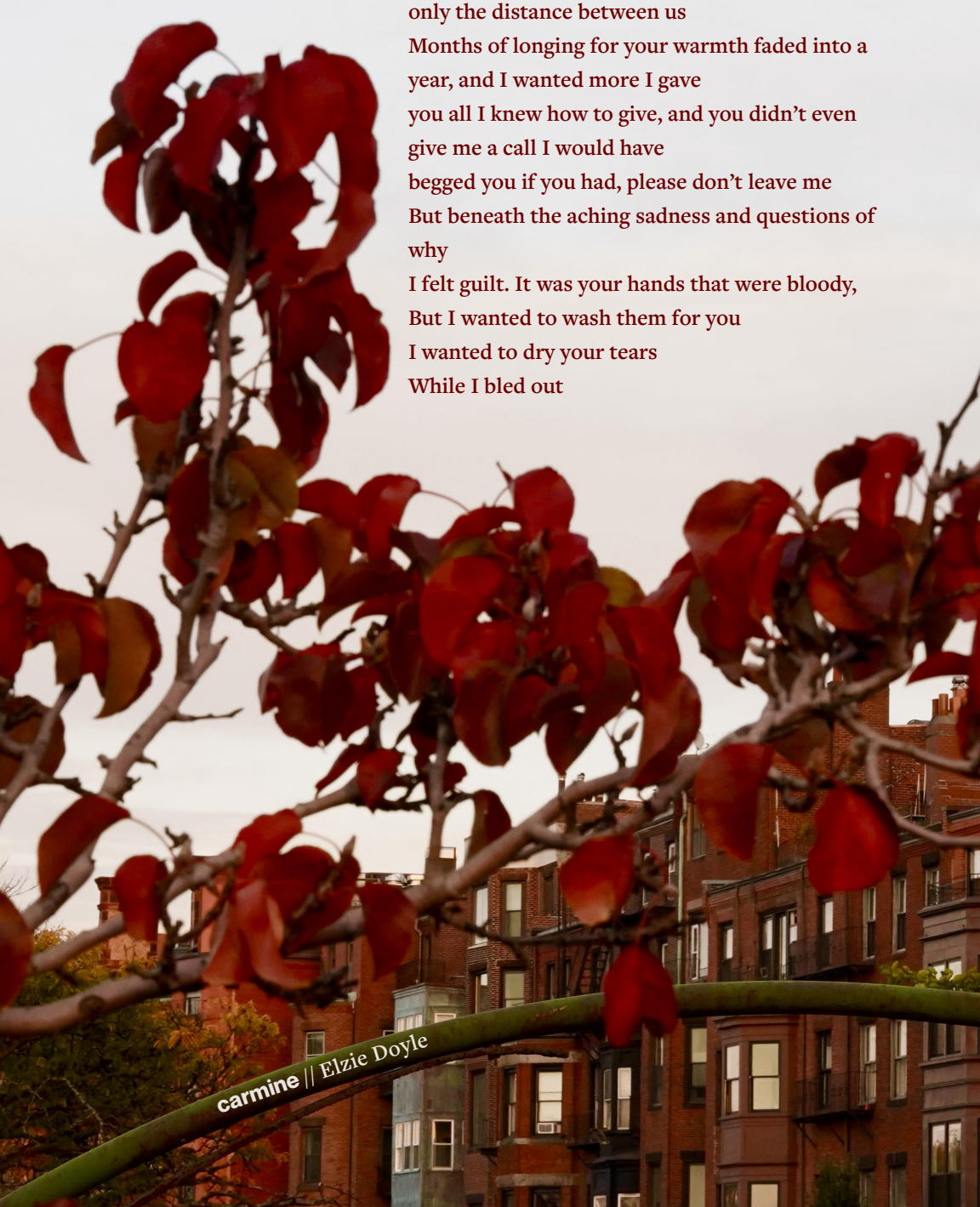
The Spirit of Performance // Gabriela Lehmann Rodriguez

just here to have fun. // Katrina Makayan

we go through the motions of
asking the basic questions, since
starting over with someone else doesn't
exactly feel brand new anymore.
i'm saying things i didn't think i'd
repeat to anyone else again.
if this is meant to be fleeting,
then why does it feel like we
could go on for forever.
you point out the freckles that have been there since i was 18,
i pretend it's the first time someone's noticed them.
maybe you couldn't tell, but i've perfected my class act over the years.
you tell me about your dreams for the future like it's your deepest secret,
but it sounds scripted from the last time.
it must've worked, didn't it?
"i want you,"
you're not the first one to
tell me that. but i tell myself
that it's different this time.
so our clothes are scattered on the floor
like we've done this millions of times before.
just not with each other.
you trace the silhouette of my body,
how do you already know where my soft spot is?
if you ask me the same question and i'll say,
"after a while it's all just the same".
i study the curves of your face as you say,
"you're so perfect,"
but i know out there someone
wishes they were in my place.
you look at me like this is the first time
you've felt this way, but let's be honest
you're not meant to stay.
don't give me those eyes, there's
no reason to have me trapped in another lie.
"we're just here to have fun, alright?"

Forgive me //
Grace Wilson

A month of bitter cold, then a series of texts, and
my heart was no longer unbroken
I gave you changing leaves, when my world was
only the distance between us
Months of longing for your warmth faded into a
year, and I wanted more I gave
you all I knew how to give, and you didn't even
give me a call I would have
begged you if you had, please don't leave me
But beneath the aching sadness and questions of
why
I felt guilt. It was your hands that were bloody,
But I wanted to wash them for you
I wanted to dry your tears
While I bled out

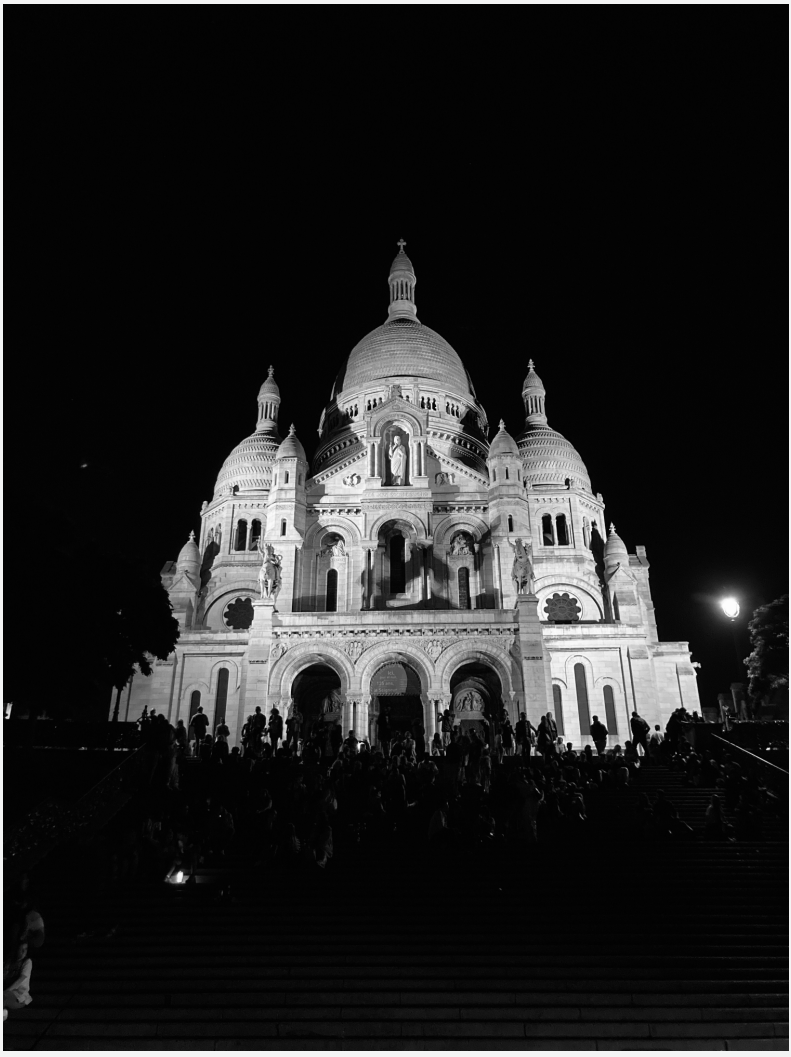


And when you were patched up and whole again
You told me that your hands were wiped clean
And that you finally wanted me back
But I couldn't pick myself up again
I had lost too much blood
And as I lay there dying
You took my hands
And left them red

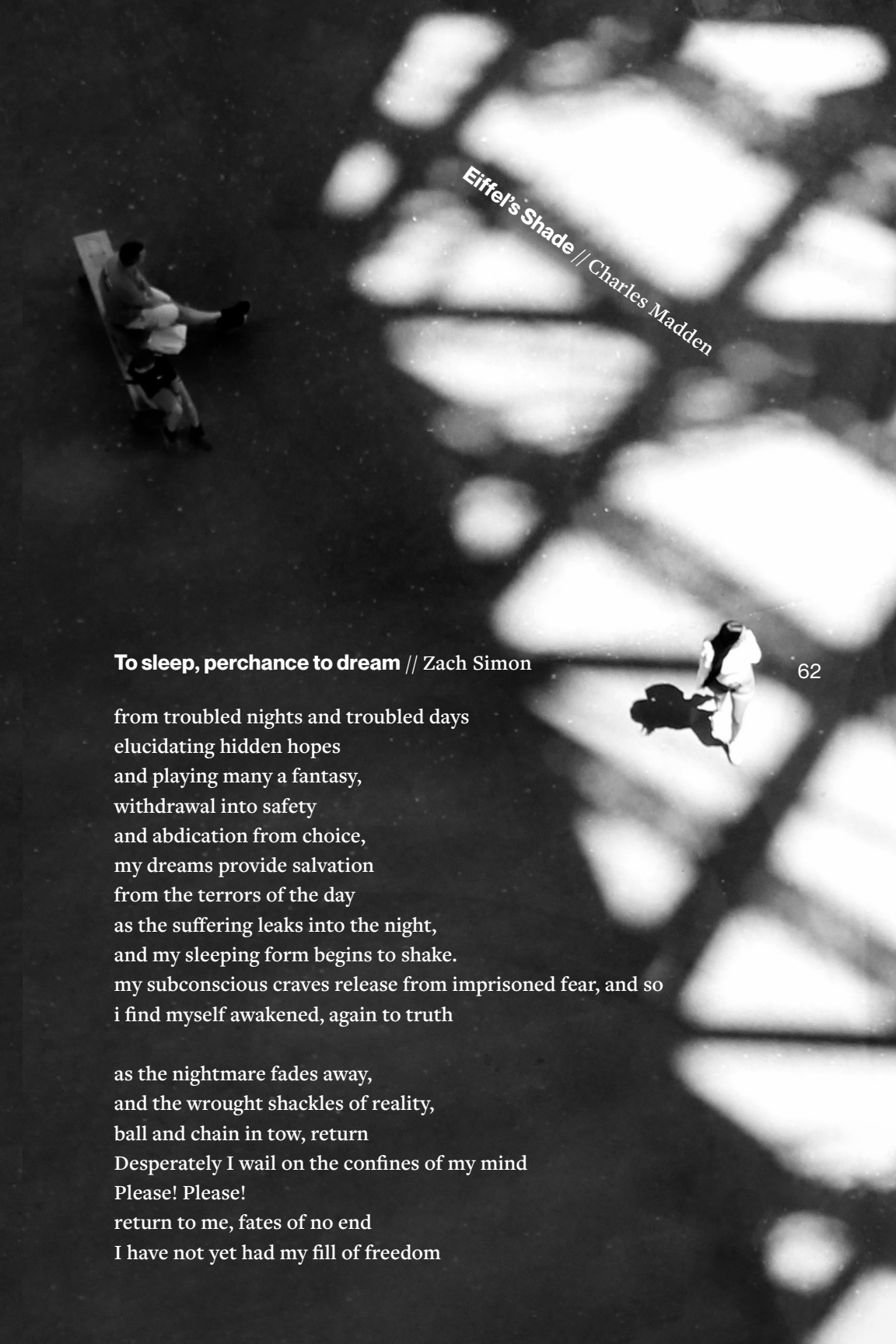
I'm sorry I can't go back to you
You never stopped loving me
Please stop crying
I have nothing
Left to give
I'm not the girl

I was before
I'm no longer
Whole

Forgive
Me



Ichor and Bone // Mia Merchant

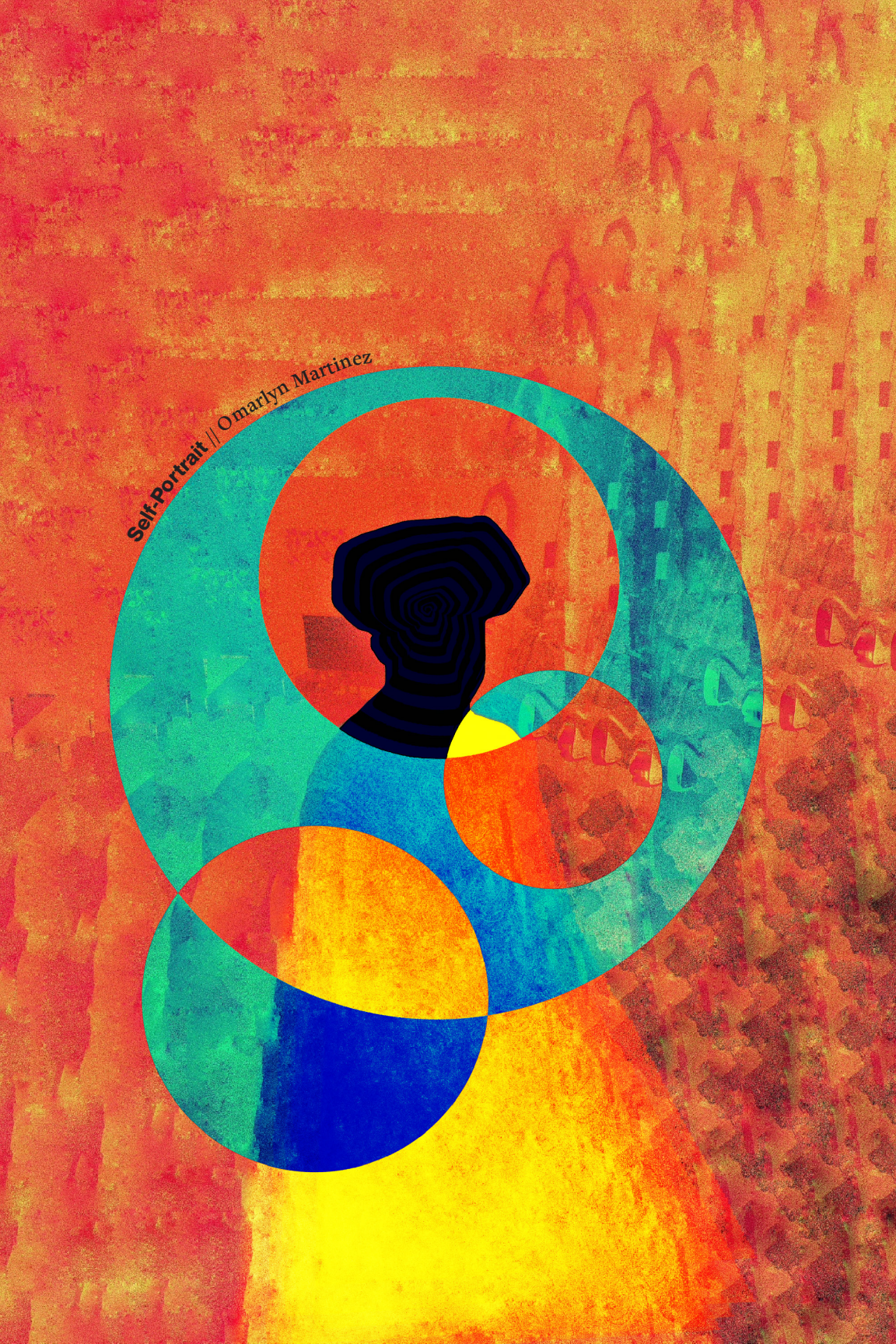


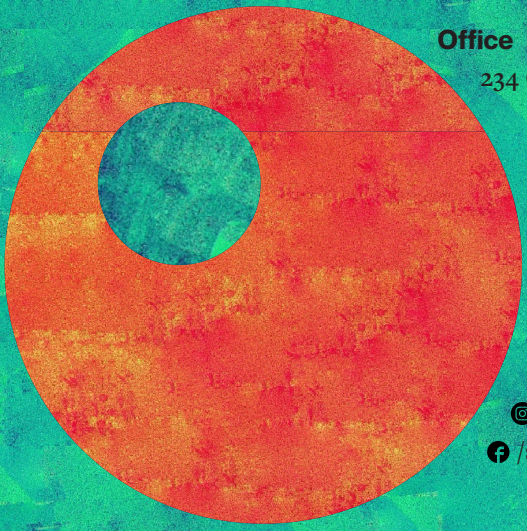
Eiffel's Shade // Charles Madden

To sleep, perchance to dream // Zach Simon

from troubled nights and troubled days
elucidating hidden hopes
and playing many a fantasy,
withdrawal into safety
and abdication from choice,
my dreams provide salvation
from the terrors of the day
as the suffering leaks into the night,
and my sleeping form begins to shake.
my subconscious craves release from imprisoned fear, and so
i find myself awakened, again to truth

as the nightmare fades away,
and the wrought shackles of reality,
ball and chain in tow, return
Desperately I wail on the confines of my mind
Please! Please!
return to me, fates of no end
I have not yet had my fill of freedom


Self-Portrait || Omarlyn Martinez

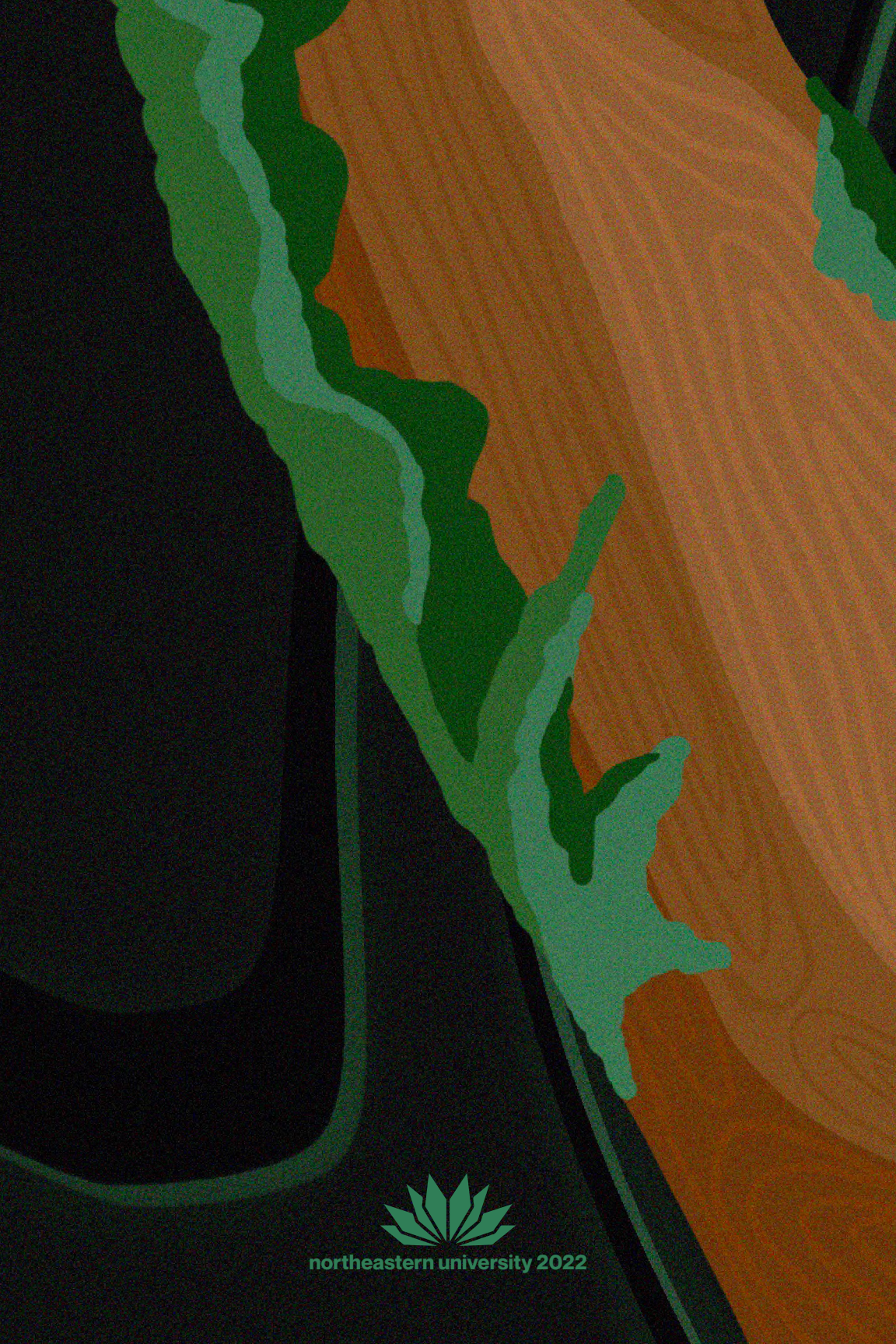


Office
234 Curry Student Center

Email
spectrum.magazine@gmail.com

Mailbox
4343 Curry Student Center

neuspectrum.com
@NUspectrum
/spectrumNEU


northeastern university 2022